

April 1, 1998 Project Update

Cooperator: Arizona Game and Fish Department

Purpose of this Update

The purpose of this update is to provide the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Recent Program Activities and Decisions

The first Mexican wolves were released into the wild on March 29-30. Eleven wolves in three family groups are now exploring their new territories near the Turkey Creek, Campbell Blue, and Hawks Nest acclimation pens on the Apache National Forest. They are being monitored by radio telemetry so that biologists can study their movements, food habits, and other behaviors. These animals represent the first wild lobos in the southwestern United States since 1970. Look for periodic updates on the wolves' activities in our ANotes From the Field, a new stop on our world wide web site at <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf/>

The three family groups were moved to their acclimation pens on the Apache National Forest January 26- February 4. The animals transferred from captive management facilities consisted of:

- Three wolves (an adult mated pair and their female offspring from 1997) to the Campbell Blue pen;
- Six wolves (an adult mated pair and their two female offspring from 1996 and two male offspring from 1997) to the Hawks Nest pen; and
- Two wolves (an adult mated pair) to the Turkey Creek pen.

The first transfer of wolves into the Campbell Blue pen was assisted by Secretary of the Department of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Jamie Rappaport Clark, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Acting Regional Forester John Kirkpatrick, Arizona Game and Fish Director Duane Shroufe, a representative from the government of Mexico, representatives from Preserve Arizona's Wolves (P.A.W.S), the Audubon Society, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, Defenders of Wildlife, rancher Will Holder, and Trish Stevenson who is a granddaughter of Aldo Leopold. Many supporters and a few opponents attended the event. A peaceful protest against wolf reintroduction was held in Alpine, Arizona. The national and regional press covered the wolf transfer and associated activities extensively.

Wolves in acclimation pens were isolated from human contact and fed on road-killed deer, elk, pronghorn, and javelina. Caretakers lived in wall tents approximately 2 mile from each pen. Wolves were held throughout their breeding season (Feb-March), and released from pens approximately one month before they are due to have their pups.

Additional animals will be introduced until reproduction in the wild is adequate to sustain the population that will be allowed to expand out through the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA), consisting of the Apache and Gila National Forests of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico. We expect that it will take approximately 9 years to reach the recovery objective of 100 wolves in the area.

The Final Rule establishing the reintroduced Mexican wolf population as nonessential experimental under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, was published January 12, 1998, in the *Federal Register*, Vol. 63, No.7, pp. 1763-1772, and codified in the *Code of Federal Regulations* at 50 CFR section 17.84(k). Most of the key provisions of that rule are summarized in the attached sheet entitled **A Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Facts.** Note also, that on the back side of that sheet are special considerations for ranchers, under the title, **A Dealing with Wolf Depredation.**

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget has issued a Paperwork Reduction Act approval for the reporting requirements in the Final Rule; OMB control number 1018-0095, dated January 29, 1998.

On March 27, Recovery Leader David Parsons approved the Mexican Wolf Interagency Management Plan. The plan reflects input and review by the Interagency Management Advisory Group and outlines the management activities needed to successfully reintroduce Mexican wolves into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA). The plan will be reviewed by the team on an annual basis and revised as necessary.

The Public Interaction Plan has been finalized and incorporated into the interagency management plan. A draft summary was circulated for comments in the last Project Update. Thanks to all who commented. This process was initiated by the Public Interaction Needs Assessment and conducted by an independent contractor for the FWS last year. The final plan is available upon request. It will be reviewed on an annual basis and your ideas and suggestions on how to improve it are welcome.

An Interagency Field Team (IFT) has been assembled to conduct all wolf management in the field. Team members include Wendy Brown with the FWS, Diane Boyd-Heger with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Alan Armistead with USDA Wildlife Services (WS). Paul Morey was hired in January as a biological technician to assist the team.

Interagency Coordination

The Interagency Management Advisory Group (IMAG), consisting of officially-designated representatives of agencies and counties to advise the FWS on issues related to wolf recovery, has met regularly to foster interagency communication and help draft the Interagency Management Plan. One of the IMAG's purposes is to consider citizen concerns regarding the reintroduction. If you have a concern or suggestion about the Mexican wolf recovery project, contact an IMAG representative. Contact information for IMAG members is attached to this update. The cooperators on the IMAG are listed below.

Apache County, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Catron County, Grant County, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Sierra County, U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services (WS), USFS - Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, USFS- Gila National Forest, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (lead agency), and the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Representatives from the AGFD, NMDGF, USFS, and FWS met on February 18, 1998, to discuss coordination of agency law enforcement efforts.

The NMDGF hosted a Mexican wolf workshop for personnel from state and Federal wildlife agencies on March 19. Biologists provided seminars on reintroduction techniques, law enforcement issues, wolf identification and ecology, depredation management, and public outreach.

Partnership Activities

Volunteers from the Phoenix and Lincoln Park Zoos, Defenders of Wildlife, and P.A.W.S were trained to assist in wolf husbandry and caretaking at acclimation pens on the Apache Forest. Many thanks to those who braved the cold nights and hauled carcasses and water to the wolves.

Captive Population Update

Prior to the spring 1998 release, there are 172 Mexican wolves in captivity, including the 11 in acclimation pens awaiting release to the wild. Twenty-eight pairs of Mexican wolves (19 in the U.S. and 9 in Mexico) were formed by the Species Survival Plan Committee last July. Animals were transferred as necessary to facilities with their new mates during autumn months. Several pairs are very young or old animals that are not expected to reproduce. Those that do successfully breed will be having their pups in April and May.

Outreach Activities

The USFS, FWS, and AGFD conducted public meetings in Arizona in Alpine on January 21, and in Clifton on February 17, to answer questions and update local residents on the status of the project. About 100 people attended the two meetings.

A community tour of the Campbell Blue pen site was conducted by the cooperating agencies on January 22. Eleven local residents were escorted to the site by snow cat and visited with agency biologists.

The IFT and cooperators are posting one-page updates on the project for residents in Alpine, Springerville, and Clifton in various public places, such as post offices, libraries, and USFS offices.

Janet Reed began work as a student intern in the FWS Regional Office in Albuquerque in mid-January. She is conducting a variety of tasks relating to information dissemination and outreach. She can be reached at (505) 248-6662.

New or Updated Information Materials Available Upon Request

These and other materials are available through our web site: <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf/>

- *Mexican Wolf Reintroduction Facts* (one page -- attached to this update)
- *Public Interaction Plan for the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program* (5 pages)
- *The Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Rule* (5 pages)
- *Mexican Gray Wolf - Challenge in the Southwest** (interagency color brochure)

* not available on the web

Please contact us if you want to receive any of these materials. We also welcome your ideas about our written communications, our general outreach efforts, and any specific suggestions you may have about how to improve the Project Update:

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